



Senate offices are slated to reopen after ricin attack

Don Young delivers broadside to Bush over veto warning



• Today's Hill Schedule at a Glance, p. 26

TOP STORY

Defiant Republicans Join Democrats on Jobless Vote

Move to provide extra federal benefits is second major setback for leadership

BY BILL SWINDELL AND JONATHAN ALLEN

CQ STAFF WRITERS

Uneasiness about the state of the economic recovery led 39 House Republicans to break ranks Wednesday evening and back a Democratic bid to provide additional benefits for jobless workers.

The vote on an amendment to legislation reauthorizing an anti-poverty program amounted to a rebuke of Republican leaders' decision to allow a supplemental unemployment compensation program to expire in December.

It also marked a second high-profile setback for House GOP leaders on labor issues in the past four months. The outcome is likely to fuel Democratic criticism of President Bush's handling of the economy and the lagging pace of job creation.

The Republican defectors backed an amendment offered by George Miller, D-

Calif., that would authorize funding through the Community Services Block Grant program of a six-month extension of unemployment compensation benefits.

Congress recessed last year without extending a law (PL 108-26) that provided 13 extra weeks of benefits for individuals who exhausted 26 weeks of state benefits.



'This issue isn't going to go away,' said Miller, a California Democrat.

Miller's proposal was adopted, 227-182, to legislation (HR 3030) that would reauthorize the block grants, which go to local groups sponsoring programs including Meals on Wheels, adult literacy, homeless shelters and job training. No Democrat voted against the amendment. The House later passed the bill by voice vote.

Democrats said they will press the issue in the Senate, likely by trying to attach a similar amendment to unrelated legislation.

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GAO Chief Walker Delivers Outspoken Warning on Deficits

BY JOSEPH J. SCHATZ, CQ STAFF WRITER

David M. Walker, the U.S. comptroller general, is in demand on Capitol Hill.

Walker, who heads the General Accounting Office (GAO), met with a bipartisan group of Senate centrists on Feb. 3, and spoke to House GOP moderates and conservative "Blue Dog" Democrats last week. House conservatives are circulating Walker's latest economic report and the New Democrat coalition has invited him to come and chat.

The sudden surge of invitations and attention represents more than just a renewed curiosity about the mundane auditing activities of the Congress' investigative arm. Rather, Walker has been publicly preaching a cautionary tale — in effect, is-

suing a warning that the government's budget shortfall and its longer-term financial vulnerabilities must be addressed.

"What I'm trying to do here is speak the truth about our nation's financial condition and long-term fiscal outlook," Walker said Wednesday in an interview. "Most [lawmakers] are very surprised when they actually see the numbers. I'm trying to provide factual information."

While Walker's arguments may sting some Republicans, Sen. John E. Sununu, R-N.H., said his words should be heeded by all lawmakers. "The comptroller is saying things publicly that I think are important to be said and I don't fault him for that,"

Walker continued on page 8

PULSE OF CONGRESS

EDITED BY KATHERINE RIZZO



WILL TOBACCO POLITICS And Deficit Politics Collide?

Southern lawmakers who don't want to go home in this election year without doing something for their struggling tobacco farmers are talking about what once upon a time was Republican heresy: deliberately adding to the federal deficit.

At a Wednesday meeting of tobacco-state Republicans, some House members floated the idea of funding a buyout of the tobacco quota system with a portion of the existing federal excise tax on cigarettes.

Tobacco farmers have been squeezed in recent years by rising production costs and limits on how much they can grow.

During a Feb. 3 campaign stop in Kentucky, House Speaker **J. Dennis Hastert**, R-Ill., said he would work to pass some kind of buyout plan.

But getting enough votes will be tricky. For the new proposal to succeed, budget hawks would have to be persuaded to give farmers money that otherwise would go to the Treasury.

The House also would have to deal with Senate insistence that any buyout bill put tobacco under the regulatory watch of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Hastert hasn't taken a position on putting tobacco under the thumb of the FDA.

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Democratic lawmakers argue that the economy is staging a "jobless recovery," with more than 2 million jobs lost since Bush took office in 2001.

"This issue isn't going to go away," Miller said. "[GOP leaders] thought it could slide by. They killed it during the holidays. No one was paying attention. . . . Now the spotlight is back on the issue, and the ball is back on the Republican leadership court."

Republican Defectors

Many of the GOP lawmakers who supported Miller's amendment represent industrial states that have lost manufacturing jobs. Others are labor-friendly Republicans, GOP moderates or representatives of swing districts. The latter category included Heather A. Wilson of New Mexico and Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia. House Administration Committee Chairman Bob Ney of Ohio also broke with his party leadership on the issue.

"I think there's some real concern that we need to refocus on that issue," said John E. Sweeney, R-N.Y.

There were indications during Wednesday's floor debate that GOP leaders knew they were in trouble. John A. Boehner, R-Ohio, chairman of the Education and the Workforce Committee, said Miller's plan would not work and called the proposal a "cynical attempt to exploit unemployed American workers for political gain."

Boehner argued that the amendment would authorize but appropriate no money for a bureaucratically duplicative program in the Department of Health and Human Services, which administers the block grants. The Labor Department normally administers unemployment insurance.

Replaying an Overtime Victory

Democratic victories on the House floor are few and far between. Wednesday's was reminiscent of the setback GOP leaders suffered last Oct. 2, when 21 Republicans helped adopt a non-binding motion instructing House appropriations conferees to insist on language that would block a proposed Labor Department change in overtime pay rules. Critics contend the rule would deny overtime pay to 8 million workers, although the department disputes that figure. Republican leaders ultimately prevailed in that battle. The language was not part of the omnibus fiscal 2003 appropri-

39 Backbenchers Break Ranks on Jobless Vote

Thirty-nine House Republicans voted for a Democratic amendment to offer federal supplemental unemployment insurance benefits for six months to jobless workers. The move had the effect of reversing a decision by Republican congressional leaders to allow a supplemental insurance program to expire in December. The 39 GOP lawmakers were:

Christopher Shays, Connecticut
Rob Simmons, Connecticut
Max Burns, Georgia
Timothy V. Johnson, Illinois
John Shimkus, Illinois
Jim Leach, Iowa
Dave Camp, Michigan
Thaddeus McCotter, Michigan
Candice S. Miller, Michigan
Mike Rogers, Michigan
Fred Upton, Michigan
Jo Ann Emerson, Missouri
Frank A. LoBiondo, New Jersey
H. James Saxton, New Jersey
Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey
Heather A. Wilson, New Mexico
Sherwood Boehlert, New York
Vito J. Fossella, New York
Sue W. Kelly, New York
Peter T. King, New York

Jack Quinn, New York
John E. Sweeney, New York
James T. Walsh, New York
Richard M. Burr, North Carolina
Robin Hayes, North Carolina
Walter B. Jones, North Carolina
Charles H. Taylor, North Carolina
Steven C. LaTourette, Ohio
Bob Ney, Ohio
Jim Turner, Ohio
Greg Walden, Oregon
Phil English, Pennsylvania
Tim Murphy, Pennsylvania
John E. Peterson, Pennsylvania
Dave Weldon, Pennsylvania
Virgil H. Goode, Virginia
George Nethercutt, Washington
Shelley Moore Capito, West Virginia
Mark Green, Wisconsin

tions law (PL 108-199).

John Feehery, spokesman for Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., said Democrats took advantage of the "open" ground rules for debate on the block grant legislation to score political points.

Asked why House GOP leaders allowed Miller's amendment to come to a vote, Feehery said, "That's a question a lot of us are asking ourselves."

Senate Strategy

Senate Democrats are weighing whether to attach a similar amendment to legislation that could soon be on the Senate floor, perhaps a bill to overhaul class action lawsuits (S 1751). They argue that 375,000 people exhausted state unemployment benefits in January.

The Democrats ultimately hope to pressure Bush to support extended benefits. After an earlier extended benefits law expired in 2002, Bush urged lawmakers to renew the program at the start of the 108th Congress. Lawmakers complied, extending the assistance until May 31, 2003 (PL 108-1).

Extended benefits were later extended again until Dec. 20.

Faith-based Concerns

The block grant bill, sponsored by Republican Tom Osborne of Nebraska, would allow faith-based and religious groups to maintain their religious identity when receiving grants to provide services. That language has been a central tenet of Bush's "compassionate conservative" agenda.

Senate Democrats have blocked all bills containing the faith-based provision, arguing that the language blurs the constitutional division between church and state. Bush has used executive orders and other administrative steps to implement the policy. The issue is expected to end up in the courts.

Rep. Lynn Woolsey of California sponsored a Democratic substitute amendment that would have deleted the faith-based provision. She argued that Osborne's bill would allow religious groups using public funds to discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion and sexual orientation. The amendment was defeated, 183-232. ♦